DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 457 220 TM 033 318

AUTHOR	Gibson, Rich
TITLE	Outfoxing the Destruction of Wisdom.
PUB DATE	2001-02-00
NOTE	20p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Achievement Tests; Coping; Instructional Effectiveness; *Social Influences; *Standardized Tests; *Teaching Methods; Test Bias; Test Coaching; Test Results; *Test Use

ABSTRACT

This critique of standardized tests begins by placing the use of such tests within a social context. It then addresses the matter of standardized testing in theory and practice in relation to teaching. The substance of standardized examinations, their common content, and the things they do not test are also explored. The relationship of good teaching to history and the corollary of research and teaching to defeat irrational thinking are considered. The paper also addresses what students and parents can do when they are confronted with standardized testing. Standardized tests are characterized by "intellectual bias, irrationalism, racism, fatuous anticommunism, witless patriotism, the worship of capital, the fear of sexuality, and the justification of the way things are." Subservience, powerlessness, and alienation are the consequences of standardized tests. Many important truths for educators and students are not represented on standardized tests. There is no standardized pathway to wisdom, nor to democracy, and good teaching is not enhanced by standardized testing. Good teaching must be aligned with the quest for social justice, and standardized testing promotes neither. (Contains 21 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 457 220

Outfoxing the Destruction of Wisdom

Rich Gibson, San Diego State University, February 2001

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Until one is committed,
there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back,
always ineffectiveness.
Concerning acts of initiative (and creation)
there is one elementary truth
the ignorance of which kills countless ideas
and splendid plans:
That the moment one definitely commits oneself
then Providence moves too.
All sorts of things occur to one
that would never otherwise have occurred.
A whole stream of events issues from the decision,
raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings
and material assistance
which no man could have dreamt
would come his way.
Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.
Begin it now.
(Goethe)

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Gibson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

At the dawn of the millennium, I got an email from a parent in California inquiring how her middle school child should respond to this question on her state test: "Trace the evolution of human rights from a classical philosophical debate about the 'state of nature" to a matter of international relations, encompassing politics, economics, history, and tradition and change." Her daughter would have a timed 40 minutes to respond. In Michigan, we call these stories, "MEAP Shrieks." to dishonor the state test.

I receive a lot of inquiries like this. My web page seems to draw people in a quandary, teachers wondering how they can be both good educators and good employees, parents wondering how they can balance their limited power and options with the levels of abuse they will allow to be heaped on their children. Students write less frequently. Those who do usually ask about their rights in school. Formally, they have nearly none (Raskin). Actually they have those rights they organize the power to take, not unlike their adult citizen counterparts. How people can come to understand their powers is at issue in the debate about standards and high-stakes tests in education.

Later in January 2000, I attended a press conference held by Michigan Governor John Engler

TM033318

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

who, as a top leader in Achieve and the National Governor's Conference, has forced standards upon my home state in ways that typify the U.S. standards and high-stakes test movement. In the press conference, the Governor announced that the state had hired a Ford Motor Vice President for Marketing to lead a promotional campaign to convince students and their parents to take the state test, the MEAP, which has been the subject of a powerful boycott in rich and poor districts alike, with some districts reporting only 5% participation. The Governor announced state college tuition credits of $2500 to students who passed the test, money drawn from the billion-dollar tobacco settlement the state received in 1999. Things were going smoothly until a middle school student, Jeremy Troisi spoiled things when he asked Governor Engler if character qualities shouldn't count as much in a student's evaluation as academic performance. Jeremy got a glare, and no answer. Later, Governor Engler moved administration of the MEAP to the state Department of Treasury, and awarded Standard and Poors, the stock agency, a multi-million dollar grant to rate the test results.

Engler, according to witnesses within his own party, is suffering of being a lame duck, hung on his own petard. His work ushered in the term limits that will usher him out of office at the end of this term. He insulted many of his more rigidly Christian followers by refusing to support their Amway-funded drive to place the question of tuition vouchers for religious private schools on the Michigan ballot in November, 2000. One suggestion the voucher proponents have made: close and voucher schools that do poorly on standardized exams.

Voucher supporters' cuts at the governor have turned cruel. Led by Republican women, the petition drive succeeded; then failed in the public vote. But the women have ripped at Engler for what they see as his betrayal. At a recent fund-raising dinner, according to two witnesses, the portly Engler was confronted by a small squad of the women as he dug a spoon into a tower of ice cream. "You are a disgrace, Governor. You are fat, bulbous, not at all a model of a Republican governor. You ooooze," one said, in a loud whisper. The war of all on all is sometimes nasty.

These stories are a pathway into a thicket of questions for educators who want to keep their ideals and still teach. I will try to explore five related issues here First, I place the question of standardized tests within their social context. Second, I briefly address the matter of standardized testing in theory and practice–in relation to teaching. Since so many people have done parts one and two in such depth, this will be a summary. Next, I explore the substance of the exams; what is in them, another topic more than well-mined, and what is not in them, what is occluded, obscured. This study of absence seeks clues to discover ways out of the high-stakes exams, and out of injustice. Then I will take up the relationship of good teaching and the science of history, suggesting that there is a corollary of scientific and historical research and the kinds of teaching that work to defeat irrationalism. What people know works reciprocally with how they came to know it. Finally, I will try to answer the question that the parent posed above, and similar questions put to me by students and teachers which ask: What to do?

The Social Context of the Exams

There is no place in the world that is growing more equitable and more democratic. To the contrary, commonly color-coded gaps of wealth and income expand between continents and within national populations. Ferocious carrot and stick, divide and conquer politics prevail behind a mask of globalism and prosperity. Total quality management, worker-to-worker campaigns, cooperative learning in schools, provide a Potemkin Village for the realities of exploitation and alienation. Talk of community is silenced by institutionalized pure selfishness, the hubris of power and privilege: arrogant warfare for markets, cheap labor, and raw materials. Freedom of choice becomes a pretense for a declining number of meaningful options. There is no place where elites want their citizens to understand how to unravel the roots of power. More, elites do not want power, a corollary of fear, noticed. Instead, privilege needs to rule under flags of democracy, tradition, patriotism, respectability, reasonableness, and perhaps above all, habit. This sums up to a numbing assault on human creativity on one hand, and a razor-sharp hierarchical ordering, made possible by largesse and a fierce willingness to use terror and violence, on another. The capital system, grown by the war of all on all, requires profits, but is as deeply concerned with ideas, the consciousness necessary to make people instruments of their own oppression. No society reliant solely on technological might and the lures of covetousness–a society which cannot trust its citizens--can last long. The next oil war will require very patriotic troops–unconcerned about the social relations of oil (Sklar, 1995, p9, Shannon, p39,1999).

Let me turn to myth to consider the processes at work here, the potential within the actual. Myths can be encapsulating, a cultural truth set up as essential, despite being bizarre and beyond rationality Or, at the same time, they can hint at an underlying notion of liberation. Myths, stories, are good pedagogical pathways. Here is one of those: Nemesis, daughter of Night, goddess of retribution *and* harmony who aimed at the arrogant Narcissus, worked almost imperceptibly. Once she had gathered her powers, rather than a frontal assault, Nemesis tricked Narcissus, who, unable to love others and enthralled with his own reflection, wasted and died, his blood forming the fertilizer for the beautiful flower that steals his name today. The mythic interrelated processes of growth and decay are a metaphor for the movement that underlies the photographic report of circumstances in the paragraph above. The situation I outlined is temporal, surmountable. The process of change is both incremental and sudden: a long look in the pond eventually becomes the flower. It is possible to build loving communities within mean circumstances; harmony can dislocate disharmony. How one makes fertilizer of injustice and privilege is as much the issue as how their workings can be understood, overcome. Nemesis, incidentally, was the name of one of many operations the Allies launched in WWII against Hitler who they defined as: Hubris.

Schools are a centripetal battlefield in the struggle for community, for rational knowledge, forthe intersection of theory and practice, for creativity; their rhetorical democratic purposes at odds with the tangled reality of organizing decay: reproducing authoritarianism and deepening disparity. The impetus for the next series of changes in North America will, I think, pour out of the schools and into society. The youth in school have a stake in social change that rises above the claims represented by organized industrial labor (once the key civilizing influence which won child labor laws, social security, the 40-hour week, the rights to organize, bargain and strike; an

influence both corrupted and made impotent by North American industrial shifts) or other sectors, which I think will trail behind the youth. The injustice requisite within the birth-rights of the capital system is permanent. Standardized high-stakes are not, and the reasoned struggle against them offers ways to come to better understand routes to challenge injustice. Hence, what teachers do counts.

Teachers, Standards, and High-Stakes Tests

This is my hurried email response to the concerned parent in California whose child was being asked to sum up the essence of the universe in 40 minutes:

"First, I think this kind of teaching/testing is a form of child abuse If you have the chance and the power or resources, I suggest you tell the district your child will not be subjected to this maltreatment–which will create its own cycle.

"Second, if you feel you must, for the time being, submit to the test, I suggest that you help your child learn the buzzwords that propel it, and have her or him write them furiously at exam time.

"I don't know your area or test, so I am not certain what these buzzwords might be. In Michigan, we have a list called the "Core Democratic Values" which are really the values undemocratically enacted by a handful of demagogues posing as teachers. Even so, it is pretty easy to commit their litany to memory, and repeat it.

"If you take the second course, I urge you to explain to your child what is going on, perhaps in terms of how Brer Rabbit finally got to the briar patch. Sometimes those who do not have a lot of power must smile at the powerful, while they gather the wisdom to make the relations of power shift. All the best, r"

This is what I wish I had said:

Good teaching, the struggle to collectively gain and test knowledge, involves a meeting of a unique and special student with an equally particular teacher, each with their own backgrounds, expertise, and passions. The meeting takes place in a discrete community, with an exceptional history and specific resources. Each of these three foundational well-springs is wrapped with a way it is understood and presented, a paradigm of curriculum and instruction. When an educator is able to create a zone of enlightenment, a relatively free and respectful spot where egos can be transformed and rigorous critique is possible, some change and learning might go on, especially if our educator understands and offers her philosophy for ongoing criticism.

The people involved in this process, as unique as they are, have a great deal in common, wherever they are. Should they chose to try to understand and change their community, their world, to create and test meaning, they will conduct their work within historical, scientific, and political contexts that offer a base of operations, a standard, that is whole, ever-interesting, incomplete, yet comprehensible.

For example, if I map the surroundings of my school, and wonder about the substantive implications of my map, I will have a geography that is not a series of carefully colored appearances, but a map that allowed me to actualize, measure, and critique my grasp of a map. My map has meaning, substance, that I helped create. If I go further, say if I join my students in mapping the political geography of playgrounds in downtown Detroit, and a suburb just east of the Detroit border, I will find my Detroit playground map will be relatively tiny, covered with gravel, weeds, or concrete. It will have broken syringes, bottles, a couple of rusted play structures, and it will be surrounded by the skeletal structures of burned-out homes. My suburban playground will be bigger, full of green life in the summer. The play structures will be ergonomic, made safe by softened ground underneath. If I see a skeleton of a home nearby, it is because that home is being remodeled, enlarged, big-footed. My two maps will have substance, and form the basis of mapping, which is also questioning, say, the U.S. and Grenada. My process works anywhere. But my unique entry-point maps will be hard to standardize–as will the psyches of each student and teacher in the school system.

In the schools I visit with the Whole Schooling Research Project, I am regularly confronted by educators, in schools designed along holistic lines, who ask me in varying ways, "How do I keep my ideals and still teach?" Once-utopian schools that I know well are assaulted by high-stakes tests, by demands to commodify children for Coca Cola, or the arrant selfishness that drives the careerism of many union leaders and principals, willing to sacrifice the membership and kids for a chance to golf with the local bankers. In one school we are working with teachers involved in a Glasser-based paradigm, a school that was formed only four years ago by teachers and parents who wanted a democratic community school teaching along whole language lines. In just four years, the focus of the entire school, except one courageous young untenured teacher, has shifted toward attaining MEAP scores; teaching to the test. One teacher alone n the building now sets aside a daily reading-storytelling time for kids. The rest have abandoned the practice altogether, in favor of teaching test-taking skills, following MEAP guides, and the Chicago-math program. There is nothing at all unusual about this school.

In a Detroit cluster of three elementary schools which, because of the assistance of local professors, received a sizeable Annenberg grant, the principals directed their staffs to hold a celebration party at the Detroit Yacht Club. There the principals gifted one another with squirting water fountains for their offices. This in schools where there are no books, no heat, in some cases, few unbroken windows. From one professor, "I attended every one of the Annenberg meetings. There was never a discussion of good teaching, never a thought of the kids' problems or the community. There was only talk about how to compete for the grant. That was always related to MEAP scores. And it results in this: water-fountains. The teaching staff went along, maybe out of fear, but maybe they want a piece too."

Standardized tests, all of them, help shatter the vital relationship of educators, students and their community. The gateway to the exams is first affective, then literary. Those who feel good about their examiners and surroundings do better. Those who read and speak in the world of the examiners excel. No standardized exam understands the emotions and literacy of any of its prey.

But the tests measure it–and punish bad feelings and wrong literacies. Moreover, behind the affective and the literacy issue is the material basis of the question: how will the child who arrives to take the test hungry, after spending a sleepless night in an unheated Detroit home do in comparison to a child arriving in a Navigator, warm full tummy, rested from a night under suburban down?

The exams disjoint the rational progress of an exploratory curriculum, breaking down the door of the classroom, stealing a teacher's most precious commodity, time with kids. In Michigan, our research with the Whole Schooling Project indicates that between 30 and 40% of teacher time is now exhausted teaching to one standardized exam or another.

Alien to the classroom, the exams seek to regulate what is known, and how it is to come to be known–on the behalf of elites who have a desperate stake in this kind of rule. Teachers lose more control over the processes and products of their work, as do the kids. The mind in the classroom becomes a regulated body, the mind in the classroom replaced by the mind of a testing agency. Every author of standards has clearly said that a key reason for their work is to replace the teacher with the textbook. Everyone involved in writing the tests I have interviewed has reiterated that contempt. The more kids and teachers engage in the standardization process, the less powerful and creative they become. The deskilled teachers become imperial clerks, missionaries for the privileged, the students' futures fixed and tamped down by utterly predictable test results. The tests drop horizons of expectations for the future and analyses of the present. This is a qualitative ratcheting up of past classroom practices, a dramatic intensification of Taylorist efforts, like textbooks, which have been in place since the McGuffey readers. A new, more complex hierarchy of the split of mental and manual labor deepens alienation and exploitation in the classroom.

The exams are meant to divide people, to quantify, exclude, and segment children. For the most part, the standardized exams demonstrate power relations in their results: parental income, race, and sex. The division of children quickly becomes division of adults, as teacher wages are tied to exam scores: an injury to one really does precede an injury to all. Pointedly, the children first hurt are often children labeled with disabilities who are quickly set apart as soon as test preparation begins. In Michigan, in January 2000, a Pontiac principal went so far as to write a letter to every parent of a labeled kid, urging that the parents opt the kids out of the exams, as the district and her school were under pressure to post high scores. Caught, she was mildly disciplined.

The exams require that some kids fail. In gotch-ya fashion, the tests are designed to steadily raise a bar that is already inappropriate for about 30% of the people eligible to take them. Proper assessment is the steady evaluation of meaningful work over time, conducted by a practitioner familiar with the test-taker and the subject, a costly prospect unless it occurs to someone that this is a teacher's daily job.

Not surprisingly, many people who must confront the exams cheat. Facing a monstrous scam, they find ways to resist–that don't necessarily confront or unveil the respectable cheaters who

wrote the exams and who so often profit from them. From New York to Michigan to California, hundreds of teachers, students, and administrators have been wrongfully exposed as cheaters, while the test authors promote exam-aids that their special, tax-funded, insider knowledge allowed them alone to create. The honest graft offered to the upper-middle class goes unnoticed. This repositioning of integrity sets up a class of people who must bear the fear and guilt of cheating, when they are not the cheats.

The other side of cheating is incompetent and inconsistent scoring. For years, the Michigan exams were scored by temps, paid slightly above the minimum wage, in the Carolinas-- under Confederate flags. But even tenured teachers couldn't agree on the exam scores in Michigan. In a series of workshops in 1999, more that 150 Michigan educators concluded that they could reach no consensus for scoring when they used the templates designed to score the state exam, the MEAP. In 1999 the state office responsible for scoring the MEAP re-set the benchmarks for passage in order to manipulate the number of failed students.

What is in the exams?

- Intellectual Bias. Philosophically, these are partisan exams--truth is determined by the political leanings of the people who wrote it. Truth, moreover, is located inside the exams, and inside the minds of the people who score it, not as it is rightfully understood as a struggle in the classroom where people can gain and test knowledge in a reasonably free and rigorous atmosphere. The purpose of the tests is the regulation of knowledge: both what is know and, importantly, how people come to know it–cognitively and affectively.
- Irrationalism, as the opening question from California demonstrates. An upper-middle class and typically white standpoint (students in prestigious private schools rarely take the tests, the powerful know better). A seemingly endless compendium of irrelevant and disconnected ideas, the incontrovertible facts chosen through a falsely neutral political process.
- Racism. In February 2000, the racists who wrote the Michigan exam, for example, were forced to withdraw a question which required the answer: Islam and Judaism, in response to a prompt for the underlying religious causes in the Middle East. The authors seem unable to reveal the underlying interests at work here: oil and capital—propelled by a nation about to elect a fanatic Christian of some party as president. The withdrawn question, however, is a mere particle of the racism that can be measured by the design of the exam, at the beginning, and the results, at the conclusion. The analysis of appearances, avoidance of going to the root, is a key pillar of standardized exams. In this sense, as in the others, the tests obstruct reason at a critical juncture in youthful development.
- Fatuous anti-communism. U.S. capital is dressed as a free market, former "Soviet" capital is presented as a command economy. The bases of supply, demand, and market choices–in productive exploitation, alienation, and fetishism–are censored. Mystical forces, the invisible economic hand, are set upon the land and pounded into

young minds. Not people, but mists of superstition, are the guides of work and knowledge.

- Witless patriotism. Social agency is trivialized. For example, to demonstrate the workings of a democratic society, the Michigan MEAP test asks what people should do when confronting noise in a park; this in a state where the largest school system, Detroit, has few school libraries; the school board was abolished, and seized by the rich. Students, who have no formal rights, relearn their impotence by being offered inconsequential questions to consider. A Michigan MEAP "core democratic value," in a society founded in revolution, is to "obey the law."
- Worship of the prime value of capital and its ideology of greed and fear: beyond individualism (me first, my reward, my future) to what Conrad in Heart of Darkness suggested was the origin of the Horror: pure selfishness. Competition for ideas, as if ideas were property.
- An abiding fear of sexuality as a matter of pleasure. Sexuality as a matter of anything at all is censored. In classrooms where a foremost question underlying most activity is the sexuality of the people involved, the absence of sexually related questions tightens strictures which go mostly unnoticed.
- A justification of the way things are; as if the way things are did not exist.

What is the greater impact of the tests?

- Subservience. Kids and teachers learn to be the sullen objects of others' designs. Occasionally there is resistance, most often superficial resistance: students cheat, play hookey, etc. It is fairly rare, now, that students and teachers take the time to radically trace the sources of the tests, the reasons for them, or refuse outright to take them.
- Intensified surveillance of children who have nearly no unsupervised freedom as it is. The educational panopticon of Foucault's shuddering prophecy, the exams move discipline from mind to body, making external discipline internal, invisible, absent in its omniscience. Fear of freedom is constituted by the nearly invisible eradication of freedom. Children become fearful of guessing, playing with knowledge, risking.
- The creation of a spectacle of farcical appearances which generates its own life. The MEAP test, which measures nothing but income and race, is reified, author-less, growing into the arbiter of housing values and human worth, career maker and breaker, seductress and torturer, dominatrix of reason. The uttermost expression of alienation in education, the tests become both the outcome and goal of work in schools.
- Powerlessness, incoherence. The message of the tests is: what you do does not matter, your world is incomprehensible, disjointed, random, chaotic–and dangerous. You are better than, worse than, never enough, always anxious for a more that you cannot determine.
- Alienated indifference to the importance of the struggle to comprehend and change the world: counter-agency. All concerned, other than those at the top of the

pyramid, are denied a picture of the pyramid. Deskilled teachers and students, creatively dulled, resigned to doing what is directed, gulled by promises of rewards or fearful of government consequences, the authenticity of the academic and practical work made a spectacle; discover themselves partitioned and propertyless, the value of their labor diminished and interchangeable. Diminution, submission, is anchored in their personalities. Repressed creativity and freedom in the arena where invention and discovery do not necessarily lead to upheaval, but it is reasonable to suspect that, with some leadership and organization, it could. Most teachers will go along. Many will not.

What is not on the tests:
Honest Human Relationships

There are no honest stories on standardized curricula and exams, no beauty, no play, no sensuality, no aesthetics, no real scoundrels (even Uriah Heep would be sanitized), and no joy. Every relationship between all involved in the testing, from the test-makers to the takers, is a relationship built on distrust, sequestration: each examiner split from the student, each question separated from the next, the only internal logic holding them together being the scamming logic of the professional test-taker. What is not on the test is an honest human relationship struggling for a significant truth that counts. The exams create a shadow universe where actions and ideas really do not matter, but the sham of the exam does, a casino-consciousness that looks at others and thinks: Sucker. Hence, the exams create a false, deceitful, consciousness which knows it must appear to be what it is not. Within this universe, even to resist can be to succumb.

Critique of Tyranny, Hope for Democracy

What is not in the standards or on the tests, and which is rarely addressed by progressive educators, is what people need to know to live in and create a more democratic, egalitarian, humane, and creative world. How do we create joyous loving communities while at the same time we seek to transform an opposition that is often ruthless? How do people confront tyranny and hierarchy with democracy and equality? I will briefly trace the path I have followed, moving from the geneses of oppression to the ways out.

Market Analyses

David Harvey locates the origins of alienated life, the recreation of relations of domination by those who suffer from them, in capital's relationships between workers and owners which require that labor be paid less than its full value, creating a surplus value that is silently seized by capitalists (37). Those who become instruments of their own oppression, like those who volunteered to spray Agent Orange in Vietnam, do so because their social relationships, beginning with their relationship to production, are pre-arranged to make them lifelong dupes, to blind them to the totality of the relationship. Marx, per Harvey, says that the only way out is to break the iron discipline of capital, to abolish wage labor (385). Harvey suggests that the relationships requisite to capital are rather easily cloaked in analyses of distribution and

exchange, where the pretense of freedom can be at least artificially upheld. However at the level of production, where neither freedom nor democracy can be allowed relevance, the realities of exploitation and greed become crystalline.

Bertell Ollman calls one of the key processes which conceal the workings of capital's discipline, "Market mystification." This mystification focuses on the arena of buying and selling, where everyone operates, and where the ideology of capital can become fully anchored in personalities which are rarely offered an answer to Ollman's question, "How else might we behave?" Day to day participation in the market, which promotes and reinforces individualism, self-absorption, artificial choices which are indeed only narrow options, the objectification of human beings as commodities, fierce competition and indifference to others, deep-seated insecurity and anxiety; leads to a false sense of equality of choice (and guilt). People are split apart by the market–but also by the institutions which provide a gloss for it, like church or school. The contradictory pressures of these institutions, "do unto others", or "share," are verbal mantras which to Ollman seem to have little impact because of the powerful reinforcing structures of the market, alluring every day. (82)

Fredy Perlman and I.I. Rubin suggest that the crux of understanding Marx is to grasp his notion of commodity fetishism. Their analysis, "Essays on Marx's Theory of Value," assaults the shadow of economics featured on most social studies exams, that is, the counterfeit economics of scarcity and choice, by insisting that political economy is the study of relations of *people* engaged in production–and the social relationships that arise. They trace Marx's progression of gateways into economics:

First Marx, in critiques of Hegel, examines religious estrangement, traces the *unhappy* consciousness, which per Hegel, was willing to allow its potentially perfect rational unity with god to be ruptured by priests, with interests contrary to spiritualization. The passage to spiritual unity for Hegel was a pathway within consciousness. A classical objective idealist for whom ideas sired reality, Hegel saw the resolution of alienation within the mind as well.

Marx makes Hegel's superficial, apparent, analysis of alienation, estrangement, profound, by more than turning it on its head, by placing it within the complex processes of the material world. Marx's "being determines consciousness" was more than the inversion of Hegel; it was a redoubling that at once raises practice into a reciprocal relationship with consciousness. Hegel examined alienation from god. Marx examined alienation within the context of capital–and located the sources in the relations of production: working people who are compelled by birthright to sell their labor do not control the products and processes of their work, and the more they engage in work the more they enrich those whose privileges deepen the miseries of the work force. The key factor of life, work, is stripped of creativity, becomes so alien to the worker that life is seen as an event outside the workplace. In turn, the more commodities, things, one has, the more one is alienated from creativity, from people, from the processes of love, labor, and knowledge. The turn to examining change, not within the mind and its brittle dualities, but within the complexity of the material world has pedagogical implications that we will need to return to

at the close.

Next Marx takes up the question of how it is that normalcy (relationships between things concealing relations between people) is established so thoroughly that it is invisible, how human properties are made to seem out of the reach of humans: how unjust production relations take on the mantle of inevitability, indiscernible, how these relations which are the creation of people seem to work independently of people. Marx calls this an "enchanted and perverted world," and names the process which denies it: reification. It is a process of reification that allows Capital, Power, and Authoritarianism to walk unseen through every standardized exam, and which allows the appearance of freedom in the marketplace to obstruct tyranny at work–and in school.

Finally, Marx turns to the origins of reification and alienation, and reveals commodity fetishism. Marx suggests that an economy producing not for use but for profit, produces commodities for sale that appear to be the impetus of relationships among people. That is, people see the beginning points of their relationships with their world as commodities, things, rather than the primary relation being to one another, to people; the appearance is that the primary relation is to things. And in a society in which labor must be sold as a commodity, people themselves become things. This explains, on one hand, why a thing, capital, can be seen as creating value or surplus value, when the pulse is labor, and on the other hand, how it is that standardized exams can pretend to quantify consciousness–but cannot answer young Mr. Troisi's question about the human qualities of testing which opened our discussion here.

The illusions that mask the creation of capital are appearances that have an important reality. If you cannot judge a book by its cover, you surely can sell it with a seductive one. The illusions do not vanish, but are eroded by a systematic assault–both on capital and the mirages that disguise it. What is especially helpful in Perlman and Rubin is their linkage of alienation, reification, and commodity fetishism in an analysis which does more than simply tie them together. They demonstrate that the passage from what is to what can be is a process that is not leaped by utopian cries for a better world, but by a careful examination of concrete social and productive relations. A complete transformation of social being is both built into a system which requires evermore social organization and interchange, and necessary within the processes of action of those who hope to develop the consciousness to change it. What can be is imbedded in an analysis of what is. Significantly though, what makes this analysis possible is the standpoint offered in the egalitarian ethics that originate in early religious understandings like the Biblical Acts 4, "distribution was made to each as had any need."

Sexuality

Now comes Wilhelm Reich. Reich, contrary to what he says is "vulgar" Marxism, insists that ideas, and ideology, are material forces–embedded in economy and in the body/mind.(14) He asks, what is it in political psychology that can answer what political economy cannot? What is the relation of ideas as a material force and the construction of personality under capitalist conditions? While it may be that every social formation reflects and recreates its economic

foundations, it is equally true that the psychological structures of people in an undemocratic and exploitative society are anchored with sexual fear and repression–which reverberates back and deepens the fear of freedom, one reason cultured and literate Germany chose barbarism over socialism in the 1930's. Why is it that serfdom is replaced by the inner slave? Why are capital's illusions so compelling, and what must be known about the minds of people anchored in capital for centuries in order to make the sacrifice necessary for the next change worth it?

Reich believed that the reason working people do not strike when denied what is rightfully theirs, the reason the hungry often do not steal, the reason youths still volunteer to fight oil wars, the inhibition of all critical faculties, is embedded in the authoritarian family, commanding obedience and fear of sex at the outset. For Reich, the authoritarian family is to the mind what capitalist production relations are to work. Organized mysticism, religion, etc., finds its foundations in dictatorial fathers. Reich is especially sharp in his investigation of the interrelation of sexuality and racism in the Nazi lexicon, which treated them (and usually communism) simultaneously: racial/political purity traced by bloodline. Sexual sin is condemned and simultaneously promoted, fetishized, unrepressed sensuality is possessed by alien races, anchoring the repressed and irrational personality. Reich demonstrates that in times of crisis, ruling powers commonly loosen sexual strictures within their class, while at the same time they step up their demands for morality, strong family values, etc. If, Reich says, the working people lost their sexual strictures at the same time they lost their jobs in times of economic collapse, any dictator would be threatened. Reich sees a direct line between abstinence and irrationalism. Reich is equally sharp on the failures of socialism. The Bolsheviks knew (and cared) only a little about the mass dread of freedom, fear of critical crituqe, and did little to address it; volunteering to replace one father with another. This would explain how a society instructing its members in Marxism, knew nothing about Marxism, why so few pointed to the naked new emperor and demanded communism, not capitalism. The way out for Reich is a process of analysis (social and psychological), and struggles for freedom (social and sexual). People need to liberate work, knowledge, and love. People must demand real gratification for every key aspect of life–and accept responsibility for it. (266) Escape from the vassal structure's triangle of patriarchy, monogamy, and sexual repression, bonds more powerful than coercion, grows from the transformation of everyday life, a positive, constructive, anticipatory project (Brown, 142). Despite Reich's late-life turn to his own forms of meglo-mania, his contributions to understanding why people willingly entrap their own fates form benchmarks for future investigations.

Negation

What is not on the high-stakes standardized tests is the form and substance of change; negation, qualitative leaps. This absence freezes the content of the tests, proposing the final triumph of history-- as does this suggested statement on citizenship from the U.S. National Council of Social Studies:

> "Our nation has fought and won many important battles against tyranny around the world. The promise that democracy holds for people of every walk of life is being spread around the globe. It is a time of triumph. The values identified in our founding documents are providing the platform from which people everywhere are asserting their voices as the right of the governed. For Americans, this is a proud moment." (NCSS Web page 2001).

This nonsense, divorcing democracy from capitalism, rising out of what claims to be the protector of the education of citizens in the US, this hubris which refuses to recognize the Stars and Strips as seen by much of the world as a source of tyranny even in its moment of techno-might; this is the standpoint of the self-satisfied test writers who see the end of history upon us. It is wrong.

Negation, negativity, contradiction, is the source of movement, self-movement, the originating point of change. In the west, knowledge of negation, matter in motion, traces easily back to Hereclitus, and reaches up to Hegel and Marx; something secret only to those so blinded by the petty privileges of standpoint that they miss the intellectual history of a couple millenniums.

Negation is not simply saying, "No," or hyper-criticism, but the recognition of the process of development of all things, all being imbued with their own opposition: in mathematics plus and minus, in physics ever action an equal and opposite reaction, in life the slow process of death, and in society the growing unity of the mass of people, the working class, within the processes of capital which requires and exploits them. Negation is simply saying that all things are interrelated, carrying their own internal contradictions, and things move, change.

The process of change moves from quality to quantity, and back again, in a growing spiral, each new quantity being entirely new, but carrying forward all of the aspects past at the same time: DNA, the triumph of capitalism over feudalism, the French Revolution, the, "I get it!" moment in a classroom. Water turned into steam is an entirely new quantity, never to be quite the same again, carrying forward all the quantities of the past.

Please let me digress again with another explanatory myth, Plato's Cave, of which I will use but a part. My hope is that this will be another pathway to describe the relationship of Hegel and Marx, idealism and materialism–and pedagogy. Plato in his masterwork, the *Republic*, posed an allegory of a cave in which a group of people were held in bondage since childhood. Facing the rear of the cave, chains prevented them from moving their heads and bodies. Behind them a fire burned and between them and the fire characters moved to and fro, sometimes speaking, their sounds echoing off the cave walls at the rear. For them, the shadows were reality, the echoes the discourse of reality.

Now several people indirectly posed solutions to this, ways out, including Plato. In each case, the point was to either be freed by another, an outsider, or to *think* one's way out–until Hegel. Hegel deepened the problem, but failed to solve it. Reasoning backward, a posteriori, Hegel assumed the position of the wise man, him, the inheritor of all of history for whom history had finally reached its conclusion, the position of totality. He reviewed events up to his moment, recognizing that at least two factors go unnoticed in Plato, work and struggle. Hegel then traced the process of these key elements of life, with considerable care, believing that the movement he tracked down was directed toward his perfection, his own intellectual development. In Hegel's system, discourse plays a vital, decisive, role, as the source of movement is the mind, and its clearest representation is discourse. Hegel, an objective idealist, believed things do change, within a

closed circular system, designed to close with him, the Spirit, the unity of the highest form of humanity, government, and the desires of the people. Still, at the heart of the Hegelian system is negativity, change, tension, opposition within unity, reciprocity; rooted in work, the path out of domination. Work makes the concept possible, and transforms the world. From Plato to Hegel, dialectics, the study of change, was merely a method of understanding, with no linkage to the real. Hegel addressed the real, as history, whose purpose was to amount to him (Kojeve, 186).

Marx did more than turn this upside down. Like a balloon, he turned it inside out–and anchored it. The brittle idealized dichotomies that Hegel proposed in history to demonstrate the processes of change, become complex as Marx moves to say that the processes of history are not circular, but a spiral, never closed, but always incomplete, driven by the internal contradictions of peoples' relations to the means of production, reproduction, and the illumination of rational knowledge. For Marx, the way out of Plato's cave is not merely to think, or to think dogmatically in retrospect, but to actively engage the study of what people in the cave must do to survive: work, procreate, and understand–an unremitting interplay of theory and practice, which can also spell out the optimism embedded in his outlook. The secret is to struggle for what is true by deepening theory and practice.

In creating value the working class may create its own domination, but it also forges the route out. Only the oppressed have a stake in the totality of the struggle for the truth, of harmony over disharmony, unity over alienation, democracy over domination. The dialectic is at work, negativity reenters, with the birth of every working-class child. Reflections on work investigate tyranny, and point toward liberation. Domination is only interested in supremacy while workers can lay the groundwork for their own freedom. This is the method of analysis, the how-it-came-to-be-known, that is necessarily absent in the tests, which purport to a default, omnipotent method that is never exposed.

Wisdom

Ira Gollobin suggests that a peak in intellectual development, related to but also propelling relations of production, is wisdom, which he suggests is a profound understanding of the relations of people to each other and their universe, the make-up of totality. Wisdom is understanding the whole, its relations to the composite parts, and humbling action–since knowledge is partial, but not so partial it is paralyzing. Anatol Lunacharsky, leader of the revolutionary Soviet education system in a brief period before Stalin acceded to power, suggested that a good Soviet citizen would be one who could "play one instrument very well, but who could hear and understand the whole orchestra too" (Lunacharsky, 47).

Wisdom is the relentless struggle for what is true, a unity of the absolute and relative, with a grasp of the particular and the general. Truth is simultaneously relative and absolute. It is noon, it is not noon. Things change. Matter moves. Our understanding can always be deepened, is always approximate, but at the same time we know enough to act–perhaps humbly and with determination.

In a society rooted in class difference, wisdom, related to prescribed ethics, can become an aristocratic reified and privileged neo-religion. Or wisdom can be a system that understands one becomes, and is, what one does–that wisdom is not only what one grasps but how one acts in regard to others. (442). Moreover, Gollobin points back to the question of alienation in Marx, that is, the more one *has*, the less one *is*. (446) Wisdom, Gollobin concludes, is directly connected to freedom, each both a means to an end, the pathways to "new vistas for the head, hand and heart, no longer wrenched apart, to attain a mass level of wisdom." (452)

There is no standardized pathway to wisdom–or democracy. Wisdom does not come without risk and pain, leaps of knowledge and practice that succeed–and fail. No democracy has come to being without a revolution.

Teach Good, Fight Hard, Grow Love

In this context, in de-industrialized North America, where there is no reason to believe the industrial working class will be a lever for democratic change for some time to come, teachers are centripetally positioned to fashion ideas which can take on an international import, and to assist in practices to challenge injustice.

The beginning point of this is to understand what value teachers create within capitalist societies. This is what Marx had to say:

> The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes to the self-valorization of capital. If we may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, a schoolmaster is a productive worker when, in addition to belaboring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation. The concept of a productive worker therefore implies, not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of the work, but also a specific social relation of production, a relation with a means of valorization. To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune. (Marx, 1985, 644)

Do teachers create surplus value, or add to the self-valorization of capital? I think they do, in a dialectical sense. Certainly, schools grow out of surplus value created by, at first, the early capitalist and industrial work force (Harvey, 399-401). Teachers work in schools which themselves are both commodities and commodifiers. They train skills, promote ideologies, make possible institutional profiteering (consider milk or cola sales, architects, bus makers, etc.) and above all teachers fashion hope, real or false. It follows that teachers create terrific value, not only in passing along what is known, but how it came to be known. Moreover, given that the crisis of the present age is not a crisis of material scarcity, but a crisis of consciousness (that is, the abundance that is necessary for a democratic and egalitarian society is at hand, what is missing is the decision to gain it), the role of educators in creating critical consciousness is even more vital. This is even more sharply outlined in deindustrialized North America, where schools have replaced industrial work places as the key organizing site of public life, and where, in turn, the struggle for social justice must shift, away from industrial unions; toward communities and education centers.

The pedagogical side of addressing these latter factors refers back to the earlier discussion of materialism and idealism in regard to Marx and Hegel. There are dialectically materialist and idealist ways to teach, having implications that support or undermine the irrationalism and authoritarianism that underlie standardized curricula and tests–and all of teaching. The way one comes to know is as important as what one knows, each acting reciprocally on the other. For our purposes, knowledge without agency cannot become wisdom. So, pedagogy is pivotal.

Idealist pedagogy assumes the world is constructed in the mind, and in most cases the mind at issue is the mind of the instructor–or a textbook. Given the powerful centrality of the mind, the ego trails not far behind, carrying all the hubris that one might expect from this process. For example, consider the idealist teacher, Dickens' Gradgrind from Hard Times who wanted , "Facts alone." Let us say Gradgrind is a historian, with a specialty in the battle at Gettysburg, Pickett's Charge, when thousands of poor, young, white southerner men marched in lines across a relatively flat battlefield into cannon fire, grape shot, and ripped to pieces–by the thousands–at the order of slavers like General Robert E. Lee, who ordered them to go march, and wrung their genteel hands later. For Gradgrind, the issues are quantitative, not openly interpretive: how many troops, wearing what, in lines how long, etc.? For Gradgrind, what is significant is the compilation of indubitable and fixed facts in his mind, *his* facts, and the presentation of the facts to the students, who plagiarize them and score well on his test. This is ego reproducing ego, idealism, passivity.

E.H. Carr in *What is History* suggests a method of history that demonstrates, above all, that people can comprehend and change their circumstances. For Carr, history is the relationship of interpretation and facts: history is an analysis of the past from a relative standpoint in the present, embedded with a call to action for the future. History is at the intersection of events, interpretations, and the values and politics of historians, a spiraling stripping away of appearances to, not necessarily superior facts, but to improved questions–always in wonder of the implications for the present. It is easy to imagine an overlay demonstrating the triangle of creating history: the event, the historian, the social context of the interpretation; and the pedagogical triangle offered above: teacher, student, community. This is a study of relationships, interpenetrations. For the critical educator, the issue is the relationship of the starting points of student consciousness, affective and cognitive, with the material issues at hand, and the needs of the community, and his/her passions and expertise. The historian follows the same path: events, the standpoint of historical progress at the moment, and the historian, always reaching for a higher understanding on the escalating spiral of practice tested with theory.

I think Carr would be happy to dig deep into Pickett's Charge, even for a semester, rather than to take the traditional route of U.S. social studies from the Big Bang to 1865. He would be at odds with Gradgrind, at the end of the day, about the purpose of doing history: to demonstrate the ego-based collection of facts-- or to prove out and test the passions of the historian, to question the paradigm at work, and to investigate the implications of the facts at hand. What, for example, got those poor southern white men to march across that field, when all indications that the unthinkable, shooting Lee and Pickett and going home, would have served them far better?

Would historical consciousness, linked to critical forms of pedagogy, get tomorrow's troops under another Pickett to behave differently? Is not social studies, in method and content, a life and death question?

Carr closes his book with this short assault on idealism: "It moves."He is moved to this illuminating brevity to counter the idealist position: things are a construction of my mind; things do not change. "It moves," is equivalent to saying, "Things change." What we address, in history, pedagogy, and science, is matter in motion; interrelated ideas, interpretations and events, perhaps serendipitously colliding, with a little luck–and some love.

Which leads me back to the opening, where we started out wondering how to sum up the essence of the universe in 40 minutes, and what that might have to do with creating citizens who genuinely care about one another.

Good teaching corresponds to good history–because each seeks to struggle to understand and change the world–in its particularities and in its universality. Good teaching is more than the circled triangle I suggested above. Good teaching involves, yes, a unique student, a particular community, and a singular teacher. That triangular meeting needs to be surrounded by a philosophy that the teacher understands and can state, and is open to criticism as well as revelation. But yet another factor surrounds the paradigmatic circle: love.

The idealist take on education is that one changes people by telling them to change, by systems of reward and punish, carrot and stick, divide and conquer; curricular control and standardized high-stakes exams, that is, continuing processes of abuse, the self-hatred that motivates the Gradgrinds of the profession. What can rupture that pattern of abuse, which must be ruptured if we teach for a better world, is rational resistance on the one hand, but love on the other–a balance within contradictions–which understands that while we must indeed address the ruthlessness of privilege, we must also learn to love one another in caring communities while we do. This is rooted in the commitment Goethe urges at the opening–and which the exams deny.

What to do? Act on a careful study of concrete circumstances as they shift. Boycott the tests. Let the kids deliberately fail them. Organize. Rupture hierarchy and sequestration in school and out. Violate the caste system. Be more kind than clever–particularly in grading. Break that pattern of abuse. Use methods that reflect the intersection of the educator, the student, and an authentic problem (Gibson, 2001)

Always historicize. Criticize everything, demonstrably. The period of Plato's cave is the period of the monologue of echoes. Let the dialogue enter the class, in the study of real processes in flux. Bare the bureaucrats who wrote the tests, and those who implement them. Discover whose interests are served by the standards. Research. Resist. Build an organization like the Rouge Forum--of people (students, parents, school workers, community people) who care about one another, about their communities and their kids. Study work, and work. This is always the requisite negation of what is.

This is not a utopian call for what ought to be, but an insistence that this is what I see going on inside those courageous classrooms where stories prevail over textbooks and tests, even though those same classrooms are set up in an indubitable yet unjust nation. What ought to be cannot simply be declared, as most utopian schools do. What ought to be needs to be forged out of what is, considering the totality of issues at work. The clues, processes, and material bases for better ways to live already confront us. This is a call for the harmony that is already there to come to dominate, dislocate, the disharmony that now holds power; to take a stand above the standards. This can be achieved with a careful study of concrete circumstances, using a paradigm that calls for its own self-critique (Rouge Forum News, 2000).

The high-stakes standardized tests, while restricting, also open up possibilities that even industrial rebellions do not. As we have seen through history, an industrial rebel is still a worker. But to fight the tests, among youth whose demand is not "More!," but, "All!", is to address, as best we can, all of the strictures of capital.

It will not do to set up a great charter school without simultaneously addressing the economic injustice and authoritarian practices that surround it. It is not enough to point at a fat governor, or to read good stories to kids in a test-based school, or to call for character education. Small schools that do not address injustice at its roots are just bad small schools. Rethinking education and criticizing the standardized tests only as a bad *method*, or the union officials who back them, is simply recreating, not rethinking. It is no longer possible to close one's door and teach. Good teaching must now be linked to a sophisticated understanding of what social justice is, the struggle for what is true, and how to get toward it. To say, "It moves," is also to say, "Things change," or "We can win."

I close as we opened, with a poem, unsigned:

> Life travels upward in spirals.
> Those who take pains to search the shadows
> of the past below us, then, can better judge the
> tiny arc up which they climb,
> more surely guess the dim
> curves of the future above them.

References

Brown, B. (1973). Marx, Freud, and the critique of everyday life. New York. Monthly Review.

Carr, E. H. (1977). What is history? New York: Bantam

Debord, G. (1990). Society of the spectacle. Detroit: Black and Red.

Dickens, C. (1995). Hard times. New York: Random House.

Foucault, C. (1990). Discipline and punish. New York: Harpers.

Gibson, R. (2001) Methods for social studies, how do I keep my ideals and still teach? Renaissance Community Press. Online.

Gibson, R (1999) History on trial in the heart of darkness. TRSE. Online

Glasser, W. (1998) Quality school. New YRok: Harperperennial Library.

Golobin, I. (1986) Dialectical materialism. New York: Petras
Harvey, D. (1982). The limits to capital. Oxford: Blackwell.
Hegel, G. W. F., (1979) Phenomenology of the spirit. New York: Oxford.
Kojeve, A. (1996). Introduction to the reading of Hegel. Ithaca: Cornell.
Lunacharsky, A. (1981). On education. Moscow. Progress Publishers.
Marx, K. (1977) Capital, Vol I Chapter 4. New York: International.
Ollman, B. (1994) Market socialism. New York: Monthly Review.
Perlman, F., and Rubin, I.I. (1990) Essays on marx's theory of value. Montreal: Black Rose.
Raskin, J.(2000) We the students. Washington D.C.: CQ Press.
Reich, W. (1970) Mass psychology of fascism. New York: Touchstone.
Rouge Forum News (2000). Online edition.
Shannon, P. (1999) Reading poverty. New York: Heinneman.
Sklar, H. (1995) Shifting fortunes, the perils of the growing american wealth gap. Chicago: Fair Economy.